

Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP)

Constant Conversation Question #3

How will we know that student learning has changed?

Q&A March 2004

The following questions and answers are intended to address planning issues relative to the **assessment of student learning**, state and federal assessment requirements, and alignment issues with other Constant Conversation Questions #1, #2, and #4 as well as the incorporation of ITAP and NCLB issues.

Note: The Q&A for Constant Conversation #3 begins with item "79" since Q&As for Constant Conversations #1 and #2 precede it.

Student Data Decision Making for AYP: Who Counts and Where?

- 79. We run an alternative school for our district and three surrounding school districts. This school does have a building number in the official state list of buildings. We serve the other districts through a 28-e agreement. Do we report all students with that building, or do we send back the scores to the contributing districts and report only our own students?**

Answer: If the sending district was involved in making the decision to send their students to your alternative school, you are responsible for assessing all of the students. However, the results of the assessment need to be sent back to the resident district, who will need to manually adjust their participation and proficiency results of these students with their school and district results.

- 80. All of the schools in the area send students to the Indian Hills Community College alternative school. So far as I know, this school does not have a separate school ID nor does it test the students with ITED. (A) Do we count these students in our "enrolled" count? (B) Do they need to start testing the students and reporting the data back? I believe these community college alternative schools are being used all over the state and I suspect all students involved have fallen off the states radar screen.**

Answer: If the sending (resident) districts were part of the decision to send their students to the alternative school, the sending districts are responsible to see that their students are assessed (either by the community college or by the school district) and the results included with the resident building and district reports. As long as these students remain on the rolls of a school district, they need to be counted as being enrolled. If they were not tested, they are counted as part of the exclusion rate.

- 81. Who is "enrolled" in a district? I believe that the dual enrolled home school students are not included in any test reporting -- even though they may be taking several classes. What about the student(s) who have been expelled/suspended but are being given alternative education at district expense? Are they to be tested and included?**

Answer: A dual-enrolled student is not included as part of the accountability system, since part of that student's education is being provided by a non-public entity, which is not part of the accountability system under NCLB. As such, these students would not need to be included in the "number of students enrolled at the time of testing" entry on the web data collection form. They are also not included in the proficiency count. Students who have been expelled/suspended and are being given alternative education at district expense, as long as they remain on the rolls of the district, need to be tested and included. If not, they are counted as exclusions.

- 82. Our district serves surrounding schools for the more severely challenged special education students. It is my understanding that we are supposed to send the test scores for these students back to the originating district. Is that true?**

Answer: Because the sending districts were part of the decision to have the students served by your district's special education program, the results need to be returned to the resident district to be included with their results.

- 83. In cases where students are OPEN-ENROLLED out of the residential district - are these ITBS/ITED scores to be included in the residential district or are they included in the open-enrolled district?**

Answer: The ITBS/ITED scores are included with the school and district into which the student open-enrolled.

- 84. In cases where special education students are attending another district because of appropriate placement issues- do these scores need to be included with the resident district? If YES - How do we do this? The reports we get from Iowa Testing would be incorrect.**

Answer: Because the sending district was part of the decision to place a special education student in another district, the results need to be included with the resident (sending) building and district results. These returned scores need to be included in all disaggregated groups for the state's website data collection form, as appropriate.

- 85. In cases where students attend an alternative high school that is a program and not recognized as a school with its own ID number - are these scores included with the residential district or the district the alternative high school is located?**

Answer: If a sending (resident) school was involved in the decision to place a student in an alternative school in a neighboring district, the sending school needs to make sure that the student is tested (the testing is likely done by the alternative school), and that results are returned to the sending school for inclusion with their other school and district results.

- 86. In cases where students are attending another district/center/program because the decision was made by a judge - are these scores included with the residential district?**

Answer: No. These results are included at the state level.

- 87. If we are a one-site school do we have to enter the information in the AYP web site for each grade twice? There is a selection for school wide data, then each individual school. As our 4th, 8th, and 11th grade info is the same district wide as it is school wide does it upload to the main group or will I have to enter it again?**

Answer: There are many districts that have more than one attendance center (mostly at elementary). As such, please enter the data again for the district. It allows us to extract data from the data file by district, as well as school

- 88. Please clarify how a district reports out on a building that does not contain any sections of 4th, 8th, or 11th grade.**

Answer: Let's say, for example, that a K-2 building sends all of its students to a 3-5 site. The results of the 3-5 site would also be applied to the K-2 building. If a K-2 building sends its students to two different 3-5 sites, the district should identify the students attending the K-2 building, or who would have attended that building (maybe by attendance center boundaries), and analyze the data for participation rate and proficiency. If two K-2 buildings send their students to a single 3-5 site, the district should identify the students attending each K-2 site, or who would have attended each building (maybe by attendance center boundaries), and analyze the data for participation rate and proficiency for each building.

- 89. If a district chooses not to consider full academic year this year, we assume that they will not be asked at some point in the future to go back and re-calculate for full academic year. Is that correct? The questions arose over a concern that data across 2 years (02-03 and 03-04) will not be calculated in the same way if full academic year is used next year but not this year, and whether that matters.**

Answer: No. Regardless of your choice to consider full academic year (FAY) for the current data collection period, for next year's data collection period, you will need to use full academic year data for 2002-03 and 2003-04. So if you use all students now, you will need to go back into your data and determine your FAY students for next year. The fall 2003 data collection period was considered a transition year. As such, schools were given an option of using all students or FAY for only the 2002-03 school year.

- 90. If a student is educated in a different district, do the scores get entered in the sending district? Does it make a difference if the two districts are on different testing schedules (i.e., fall testing in one, spring in the other)?**

Answer: If the sending district participated in the decision to send the student to a different district, the results would need to be returned to the sending district for inclusion in the accountability calculations. For proficiency, time of year tested should not make a difference. Norms for proficiency are established for the various testing windows throughout the year.

- 91. Is there a reason why gender is not listed as a subgroup?**

Answer: Gender was not written into the law or the regulations for Adequate Yearly Progress. However, Gender is a required breakout for reporting purposes.

- 92. As a new (03-04) whole grade sharing district, what data will I need to enter into this year's AYP system? How would biennium baseline be determined? Do student scores "vanish" for previous years, and if so, how would progress be determined?**

Answer: Since the current AYP determination is based on 01-02 and 02-03 data, enter the data for those years. The web-based data entry system will determine the biennium numbers. If you are the receiving school in the whole-grade arrangement, for 03-04, you will need to report on just your original students, since the students from the sending district would not have met the Full Academic Year (FAY) requirement. Then for 04-05, you would report on the combined group of students.

- 93. Please explain direct feed/back mapping. We have one K-3 building, one 4-5 building, one 6-8 building, and one 9-12 building. The K-3 building doesn't have any of the grade levels required for reporting. What do we need to do?**

Answer: Enter the data for the 4-5 building into the K-3 building's spaces on the form. The AYP decision for the 4-5 building will also apply to the K-3 building. This will also be done at the District level.

- 94. If a district has a 6-7 building and a 8-9 building, then there are two choices for backmapping the data for the 6-7 building. 1) The data for the 8th grade can be entered for the 6-7 building. OR 2) The data from the 7th grade students the year before who have 8th grade ITBS scores are used to calculate the percentage who are proficient for the 6-7 building. Choice 2 looks like full academic year calculations. If choice 2 is acceptable, then does the district have to calculate full academic year for all other grade levels?**

Answer: Yes. Because this is a special case that bridges two separate physical facilities, for the current data entry, the district has the option to use either all students or full-academic-year-only students for the other grade levels. For this year, the backmapping should mirror the procedures for all other sites: either use scores for all students, or use scores only for students who meet the full academic year requirement. For the 2002-03 and 2003-04 biennium, full academic year data will be used, so this will not be an issue for the next data collection.

District-wide Assessments

95. In what ways do students participate in district-wide assessments?

Answer: ALL students participate in the district-wide assessment system. There are three ways that a student can participate:

- Taking the general district-wide assessment in the same way as most other students
- Taking the general district-wide assessment with accommodations
- Taking the state-designed alternate assessment

96. If a district reports all students for the AYP for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, will the district be required to resubmit data for 2002-2003 (as full academic year) when they submit full academic year data for 2003-2004?

Answer: Yes.

97. We have students whose ethnic group is not one of the choices for subgroups (i.e. multiple races or other--as a specified group on the ITBS/ITED answer sheet). What do we do with those scores? Also we have some students who did not choose to specify their race, therefore our total numbers do not match. Is there a remedy for this?

Answer: The District needs to identify one of the five groups into which a student's results should be placed, then combine that student's scores with the rest of the results. The only remedy is that the district needs to determine a group where the student needs to be included.

98. 21 students did not code their ethnicity correctly and were not included in the dis-aggregated data. We have 75 4th graders but only 51 white students and 3 other ethnicities. How do we report this?

Answer: If you have the CD of data returned by the Iowa Testing Programs, you can load that into a spreadsheet or database program to determine the specific students who did not code their documents. You will need to determine the category into which these students should be included, and will need to re-analyze your data to determine your proficiency percentages to enter into the web collection form. To prevent this from happening again, you could utilize the bar-coding service provided by the Iowa Testing Programs, have someone check the answer documents for proper coding prior to submission to ITP, or have an adult do the coding prior to the test administration.

99. In the ITBS/ITED files, some students were coded as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander or Other. These were valid codes for the test. In the AYP, there is no place to report those codes. Should those students be reported? If so, under which race/ethnicity?

Answer: Generally, these students have traditionally been grouped into a single category and titled, "Asian/Pacific Islander." The students mentioned in this question should be included with the "Asian" category on the web-based data collection form.

100. Are schools required to demonstrate the use of multiple formats and multiple approaches for district-wide assessments?

Answer: Multiple formats and approaches are expected under the '94 federal Elementary and Secondary Act and are good assessment practices in the development of the district assessment measures. However, demonstrating the use of multiple formats and approaches will not be reported in the APR for Iowa compliance requirements.

Multiple Measures

101. Do all students at the locally designated grade level or levels for the multiple assessment testing have to participate in the multiple assessments for reading, mathematics, and science?

Answer: Yes, pursuant to 281—IAC 12.8(3)(b)(5) multiple assessments were required in reading and mathematics as of September 15, 2001 and for science by September 15, 2003. The only students who do not participate in district-wide assessments required in Chapter 12 (either the primary assessment or multiple assessment) are those students whose IEPs designate an alternate assessment.

Accommodations and Modifications

102. Must students with IEP's take all district-wide assessments administered, or can we document in an IEP that he/she will only take the MAPS and not the ITBS?

Answer: All students must be included in the district's accountability system. The IEP team is required to decide how that student will participate and be included, whether through taking the ITBS/ITED or through the alternate assessment. The IEP team also should determine how specific students also can access the other district-wide assessments administered by a district. If a student with an IEP does not take the measures for accountability which are the ITBS, the ITED, or the alternate assessment they must be counted as exclusions. If they are provided an opportunity to engage the assessment but do not, they may be counted as participating, but not proficient.

103. What technical assistance will be provided to help schools with appropriate accommodations for students with IEPs?

Answer: School districts should use guidance provided by the Iowa Department of Education, Technical Assistance Guide District-Wide Assessment Decisions For Students with IEP, 504, or English Language Learner Services, available at the following URL:
<http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/is/dwa/doc/tag03.doc>

104. Can accommodations be provided for students other than ELL and students with disabilities?

Answer: Yes. Students with 504 plans may also take tests with accommodations, provided they are specified in the 504 plan. All other students (with the exception of English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and students having 504 plans) should take tests without accommodation. On rare occasions, a student may have injury or circumstances that might require a reasonable accommodation—but that is a local decision.

105. If a student takes the braille version of the ITBS reading comprehension test and scores above the 40th percentile, is that student counted as proficient for AYP purposes?

Answer: Yes. Because of the manner in which the development of the Braille edition was developed and scaled, we believe that the use of the Braille edition for determining proficiency of students taking this test is acceptable to be counted toward proficiency targets for AYP purposes.

106. The ITBS Directions for Administration state the accommodations most frequently used by students include extended time, tests read aloud, answers recorded, repeated directions, transferred answers, tested off level, etc. If any of those are written into an IEP by the IEP team, will that student then be automatically deemed nonproficient?

Answer: Not necessarily. What the IEP team needs to determine is whether or not the accommodation will compromise the validity of the construct being assessed. For example, reading the reading test makes it a listening test, and therefore is not considered an appropriate accommodation. There are too many issues imbedded in this question to address questions about a specific student. Recommend involving the AEA assessment consultant in the decision.

107.What testing accommodations are allowed under the Iowa Plan?

Answer: IEP teams should refer to the Test Coordinator's Guide for items related to accommodations that are appropriate for ITBS/ITED administration. This should be done in preparation for documenting student assessment conditions for the IEP.

Alternate Assessments—Students with Disabilities

108.What is an alternate assessment?

Answer: Generally, an alternate assessment is understood to mean an assessment designed for those students with disabilities who are unable to participate in general large-scale assessments used by a school district or State, even when accommodations or modifications are provided. The alternate assessment provides a mechanism for students, including those with the most significant disabilities, to be assessed on the same standards for all students.

Alternate assessments need to be aligned with general curriculum standards set for all students and are only appropriate for those students with significant cognitive impairments. However, the need for an alternate assessment depends on the individual needs of the child, not the category of the child's disability. Although it is expected that the number of students participating in alternate assessments will be relatively small, participation in alternate assessments should not, in and of itself, prevent students from accessing the same benefits available to non-disabled students for their participation.

109.Is parental permission required for children with disabilities to participate in State and district-wide assessment programs if parental permission is not required for the participation of non-disabled students?

Answer: No. If parental permission is not required for participation in the State and district-wide assessment programs for non-disabled children, it is not required for children with disabilities. However, parents of children with disabilities, as members of the IEP team, will be involved in IEP team decisions on how an individual child will participate in such assessment programs.

110.Does a copy of the portfolio need to be given to the parents and/or student?

Answer: The portfolio does not need to be given to parents but the contents should be shared with them so they are better able to understand the alternate assessment process. The portfolio should be considered as a testing protocol and be handled as such.

111.Who scores the bodies of evidence?

Answer: Trained scorers consisting mainly of local teachers, school faculty, and AEA staff score the bodies of evidence. Each AEA collects the portfolios for its region and brings them to a central regional location in late spring to be scored. A team of trained scorers scores each portfolio twice. Any discrepancies in scores are resolved by a scoring leader. After scoring, the scoring worksheets along with the portfolios are returned by the AEA to teachers. AEA scoring teams are grouped into four regional training and scoring centers.

112.Is the alternate assessment standards based or standards referenced?

Answer: Standards referenced. In Iowa, each local district determines their own standards and benchmarks. Standards based suggest that the same standards and the assessments are used across the state. For the 2003-2004 school year, student progress will be assessed in one reading standard and one math standard.

113.When does the alternate assessment process begin at the LEA level?

Answer: For statewide implementation, the only students who needed to be assessed for accountability purposes are those in grades 4, 8, and 11 or their age equivalents. Assessment itself should be ongoing and directly connected to daily instruction. The procedures upon which alternate

assessment are based reflect research-based, effective practice instruction and therefore, should be implemented regardless of whether or not the student is in an accountability year.

114.What is the connection between the IEP and the Alternate Assessment?

Answer: According to IDEA'97 and NCLB, the IEP must address the student's progress in the general curriculum. IEP goals and objectives that deal with student performance in reading and math must be aligned with district standards and the core content standards and benchmarks corresponding to the Iowa Tests and used in the alternate assessment. Other IEP goals such as communication, social, or motor skills may be considered access skills, but will be coded as either reading or math goals as appropriate. The IEP goals will be linked through activities, settings, and materials to content area instruction and standards. Some students may have goals and objectives on their IEPs that are not standards-referenced (e.g., self-care skills) and these would not be the focus of the assessment nor would they be included within the portfolio assessment evidence even though they are important goals.

115.What information can the alternate assessment provide toward the purpose of instructional improvement?

Answer: It can give good information not only on where a student is performing but also what teachers, schools, and programs can provide in order to facilitate the student's learning and performance. If the assessment information does not provide a typical representation of the student's daily performance and instruction, the assessment will not be as effective or valuable in terms of the information obtained.

116.How can alternate assessment be accomplished with a minimum of extra time/work?

Answer: For programs that currently provide standards-referenced instruction, collect data, and implement other effective practice instructional techniques, the paperwork collection and organization will take a minimal amount of extra time. Some students will be able to assist in this, too, giving them more ownership over the portfolio process. For programs that are not currently providing this type of instruction, time will be a factor in aligning instruction standards and in collecting data that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Research on alternate assessment indicates that the amount of time a teacher spends doing "assessment activities" and putting alternate assessment evidence together has very little correlation to assessment scores. There is, however, a strong correlation between scores and the degree to which assessment is integrated with daily instruction.

117.Should students who could be predicted to be unsuccessful in the general district-wide assessment for any reason(s) (e.g., low academic skills, refusal to participate meaningfully) participate in the alternate assessment?

Answer: No, only students who meet all of the Participation Guidelines can be in the alternate assessment. Lack of accommodations, refusing to use them, and other types of concerns centered around success on the general assessment are instructional issues and should be addressed on a daily basis prior to assessment. Because of the format and rubric criteria of the alternate assessment, students who do not meet the Participation Guidelines would not be predicted to score well in the alternate assessment.

118.Are the "functional" skills on students' IEPs measured in the alternate assessment?

Answer: The focus of the alternate assessment is on the general education standards. Functional skills will not be addressed in alternate assessment unless they are connected to standards in reading and mathematics. For some students, functional skills are skills that facilitate student access to the general education curriculum and environment. The 2003-2004 Educator's Guide will help educational teams to look at more traditional "functional" skills and determine how they might be expanded to achieve the goal of work on the general education standards. However, the main focus of assessment is to show how the student is progressing in the general curriculum and hence, working toward the same standards as typical students.

119. For which portions of district-wide assessment must an alternate be provided?

Answer: The achievement of students with IEPs must be assessed in at least one district reading standard and at least one district math standard. This can be accomplished by participation in the portion of the DWA that allows for comparison between groups on national or state level norms. For most districts in Iowa, this assessment is the ITBS or ITED. If the IEP team determines that the student can not participate in the portions of the ITBS or ITED that measure achievement in reading or math standards, the student must participate in an alternate assessment in that content area.

120. Is it permissible for a student to participate in the general district-wide assessment in one standard area and an alternate assessment on another standard area?

Answer: Yes. Students who can meaningfully participate in any portion of the general assessment should do so. The student may participate in alternate assessment for other standards if participation in the general assessment is not appropriate. If a student participates in alternate assessment in only one standard area, the teacher should include the cover sheet for the other standard area and indicate that the student participated in the general DWA for that standard area.

121. How are results reported for a student who participates in the general district-wide assessment in one standard area but an alternate assessment in the other standard area?

Answer: For the standard area in which the student participates in general district-wide assessment, the student's score will be included with his or her grade level results. For the standard area in which the alternate assessment was administered, results will be presented with the student's grade level alternate assessment results. When the teacher submits the student's alternate assessment portfolio to the areas, he/she should include cover sheets for BOTH reading and math. On the cover sheet, indicate which standard area that the student participated in by means of the alternate assessment and which was assessed by the general assessment.

122. Can participation in a criterion-referenced or locally developed assessment substitute for the alternate assessment?

Answer: No. This is not possible because the criterion referenced or locally developed assessments do not allow for comparison across the state. A criterion referenced or locally development assessment is considered to be part of an LEA's general district-wide Assessment Program. Students should participate in these assessments to the extent dictated by IEP Team decisions. If participation is contraindicated, they should participate in the alternate assessment.

123. Can special schools develop their own standards and benchmarks, separate from the standards and benchmarks of the district?

Answer: No. Generally, the special school will use the standards and benchmarks of the district in which they are located. In the unusual case in which the majority of the students in a special school are from a single neighboring district, the standards of the district from which the majority of students originate may be used. Special schools usually serve students from many different districts, and it is not feasible for a teacher to assess each student in the standards for his or her individual district. There is no separate "special education curriculum." Progress of all students is assessed in terms of district standards, established for all students.

124. Do all students with an IEP marked with alternate assessment require a portfolio?

Answer: Yes. Every student with an IEP must participate in the district – wide assessment system. The alternate assessment body of evidence applies to all grades that include general education students in their district-wide assessment system.

125. When we talk about the 1% of students for alternate assessment, is this within a grade level, school building, or a district?

Answer: NCLB does NOT limit the percent of students able to take the alternate assessment. A student's participation in the alternate assessment is decided by the IEP team. Any student taking the alternate assessment is counted in the participation rate. However, you can only use a maximum of 1% of the proficient scores at the district level toward district AYP. There is no limit at the building level.

126.What does a district do if they are over the 1% limit?

Answer: Contact the Department of Education to discuss the process to request an exemption to the 1% rule.

SINA Designation and Assessment

127.If an Iowa school is identified as a School In Need of Assistance (SINA) is it required to revise all assessments, instructional practices, curriculum, etc?

Answer: No. The school should first carefully review the current effectiveness of its educational program to identify and address achievement gaps. This involves reviewing multiple aspects of the school's educational focus, including district and classroom assessments, instructional practices and initiatives, and standards/benchmarks/curriculum. Not all assessments and instructional practices are ineffective. The school may not be fully aware of what's working and what isn't. It is important that staff-engage in reflective dialogue about materials and student work to determine what has been ineffective in increasing student achievement. The school should explore several scientifically-based research strategies and valid/reliable assessments to identify those that will best meet the achievement needs of students.

128.A review of our data shows that the lowest achievement gains are found in our subgroup populations. Can we identify specific students in these subgroups and focus achievement strategies toward them?

Answer: Consider the question, "What will be gained by identifying individual students within a subgroup needing to improve achievement?" All students require focused efforts, especially those who are low-performing. Low performing student scores are readily available to classroom teachers. Focusing efforts on all students in order to increase student achievement should result in increased student achievement building-wide.

129.How do we respond to our public when our SINI status is made public?

Answer: State the positive intent of NCLB – that your school will be focusing its efforts to improve achievement for all students and admit that, at this time, some students may not be achieving to their full potential. Communicate what your school is doing to raise the achievement of all students. Take this as an opportunity to tell the story of your school. Talk about what's right about your school. Gain the support of parents and the community to do their part in helping students achieve.